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## Make Your Visits Count

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# Make Your Visits Count!

This leaflet is for you, the Indiana Home Demonstration Agent. It's designed to help you make your visits to families enrolled in Farm and Home Management more productive. However, most of the material is pertinent to all visits any Extension agent would make.



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SUMMARY

1. Professional visiting is an art which you can perfect by practice and study. There's no book of rules, but remember that your visit can be successful only if you and the homemaker are at ease with each other.

2. Your visits are aimed at helping the family. You may visit to encourage participation, help clarify goals, help the family see its alternatives, or to assist them in working out annual plans.

3. Arrange your visit to fit in with the family routine. Use tact in whatever you say or do. Be observant, listen sympathetically, and phrase your questions with care. When you give advice, use terminology the family understands.

4. Visits are a part of the total extension program and provide you with an excellent chance for both professional and personal growth. As you work with this method you will find stories and develop result demonstrations that you can use in your program with mass media. Plan your visits, set aside a definite number of days on your calendar for this part of your work, when you set dates for your group meetings. Record useful information after visits, and put this information to good practical use in your work.

## I. PROFESSIONAL VISITS -- AN ART

Everyone does visiting. Everyone does it as a part of his business as well as a part of his social life. Doctors, lawyers, credit managers and teachers use visiting as a method of helping their clients. For the social case worker the visit in itself assumes mammoth proportions, and, in effect, symbolizes the profession. In professional circles this way of working with people is more often called interviewing than visiting. The principles of interviewing, actually a subject of research, constitute a considerable body of knowledge studied in schools of social service. To observe one who has mastered the method of the visit is to observe an artist at work.

Skill in visiting is perfected by practice and study. There is no book of definite rules. This method of reaching people is used because human beings and their situations are unique and can often be dealt with best individually. You may feel somewhat helpless in situations where you must "play by ear." You are probably more accustomed to teaching in fairly controlled and formal surroundings. Although you sincerely want to help you are apt to feel inadequate, self-conscious and lacking in experience. A visit can be successful only when both you and the homemaker are at ease with each other -- at least enough so that both of you can give your attention to the purpose of the visit. Study as well as experience is necessary to gain this confidence. To examine your approach in a visit need not rob it of its warmth and spontaneity -- in fact it is one way to prevent your allowing it to become routine.

Extension workers, in attempting to educate people, have always tried to teach individuals. For that matter, the tutorial method has long been used by those who were financially able to afford it. For the learner to have the undivided attention of the teacher has many advantages. This does not deny the fact that for some subjects there are advantages to group learning. Complex problems that are extremely important to the family involved are not likely to be of sufficient interest to others to hold their attention in group lessons. We are apt to avoid problems of a confidential nature -- to the dissatisfaction of many individuals -- when we work in groups. Applying complicated generalities and principles to their own problems and situations is difficult for many people. Examples help, but none are so vital as "my own case."

Experience is the best teacher. The part of the tutor is to direct these experiences so that the student makes the most of them.

EXAMPLE: Mary Jane is 10 years old. She and her mother are anxious that she acquire some homemaking skills. The experience that may most effectively accomplish this is possibly enrolling in 4-H. When Mary Jane is 15, she is anxious to become more independent and to try her hand at grownups' responsibility. Being a junior leader is likely the experience. She also begins to think about wanting a scholarship; to plan her 4-H and school activities program toward this end may better be done with some individual counselling.

One often measures his successes by some known standard. However, your goal in working with individual families is not to produce standard products, nor standard individuals in standard families. On the contrary, you should strive to draw out that rare asset within a human being: his varied potentialities. You may draw out the best in people by being a model person yourself. Moreover, since agents teach by precept, they themselves must be worthy of emulation.

## II. WHY WE VISIT

All of our visits are made to help the family. We visit to understand them and their situation. When we initiate the visit, it is important to let them know our reasons for the visit at the very beginning. If the family arranges the visit, it is important that you restate the reasons they originally indicated. If and when the family asks you to visit, they may have only a vague notion of how you can help them, or they may give you reasons which are, inadvertently, false. Even though you know specifically why you started the visit, it is well to be ready to shift your sights toward other objectives if needed. Examples of visits for each of the following purposes are given at the end of this publication.

### To Encourage Participation

One of the best ways to gain an individual's confidence is through face to face contact. Management agents will visit more families for this purpose than you will. Sometimes a visit of this sort will be needed to encourage the wife to attend the group meetings. Your purpose may possibly be achieved more effectively if you visit the husband as well as the wife -- a visit planned to help them both understand that the program is designed for the couple. This type of visit is sometimes undertaken to help the wife see the value of understanding her husband's point of view. Among other things, these visits may involve you in helping to make arrangements for baby sitters. Furthermore, some personal service during these visits is occasionally justified.

### To Help Clarify Goals

One of the major purposes of the family unit approach is to help families clarify their goals. However, the family is confronted with a complex problem when they attempt to explain their goals; therefore, you can best cope with the problem by putting it on an individual basis. By discussing their goals with you, the family may be able to bring them into sharper focus. A discussion may help the family organize their thoughts so that they are able to discern which aspects of their goals are important and which aspects ascribe to relatively less importance. There may be times when the agent will help clarify in detail only one goal on a visit.

Some special help for these visits includes the questions in the Planning Guide. When talking to the family about goals, a trip through the house is one good way to get at all areas of family living. The ever-present immediacy of certain sections of the house -- sections which certain members of the family associate with particular problems -- may help the family reveal their satisfactions and dissatisfactions with the house itself. The kitchen, for example, may bring forth some talk about food; a place to sew or do the laundry can initiate a discussion of clothing. The children's rooms or their recreational facilities may lead to a conversation which reveals the parents' concern about the development of their children. With the familiar surroundings of the children as a background, the parents may wish to talk about goals they have in mind for their youngsters. "If \_\_\_\_\_ were no handicap, how would you . . . ?" is often a good lead.

### To Help See Alternatives

Information regarding various solutions to problems, various ways of accomplishing goals is given on these visits. Extension agents have done this sort of thing with club mem-

bers and in response to individual calls. It is the way we have worked primarily with farmstead development plans and house plans. It is important to point out advantages and disadvantages of each alternative. The mimeo sheet number 3, BF & BL Eva. offers some suggestions for specific action in problem areas. Getting suggestions about what answers they had already thought of, what their neighbors had done in similar situations, what former occupants had done will always increase the number of alternatives offered.

### To Work Out Annual Plans

In working out an annual plan a family ties together current changes in practices with their over-all plans and goals. The Planning Guide was developed for this very reason. On these visits families commit themselves to undertake action that they believe will lead them toward their goals. Sometimes these are done for the purpose of motivation. We learn to make decisions by deciding. As teachers use examinations, we sometimes use these visits to motivate the families toward experiences that will accomplish their and our goals.

## III. HOW TO VISIT

### Arrangements and Procedures

Your own attitude is one of the most important factors in creating the atmosphere of a visit. Look the people in the face! Home Economics Agents, too, are unique individuals with personal prejudices, values, and standards. It is usual to assume that your own view is the natural, logical and sensible one. Your clients feel the same way about their viewpoint. For most of the visits it will be best to make an appointment. It is important that the family understand whether the visit is designed for all of them or for just the homemaker. It is usually best to arrange these visits in the afternoon or early enough in the morning so that they may be completed before the homemaker needs to prepare her lunch. It is well to find something about the home that you can admire and compliment to help get the conversation flowing early and the atmosphere relaxed. However, the praise must be genuine or it can quickly be spotted as a "technique."

Similar personal interests also are good conversation starters. In discussing subjects of mutual interest you must exercise some caution to keep the visit professional and not just a social session. Let the client talk first. Very often you will get her point of view, see her real problems, as well as those she has stated and several important aspects of the situation, without your directing the conversation. It is important to develop a sense of timing on visits. Don't ask confidential questions until you have gained a client's confidence. It is better to have some easy reassuring comments at the end of the visit rather than to leave on a high pitch. Some of the visits may be as short as a half hour or less. This is especially true of those to encourage participation or to check up on progress. However, the longest visit should not run over a couple of hours.

### Observation

It is important to remember that the things you see when you visit are not seen in the same way by your host and hostess. Notice the physical surroundings--how they do the laundry, cooking, sewing, food preparation, where they eat, how they go to town. Notice things they have chosen for pleasure and beauty. You can get an idea of their health by noting



posture, weight, and general appearance. Whether or not the children are at ease or tense and how comfortable the parents are in the joint interview will help you understand their family relations.

### Listening

For you to listen sympathetically (without passing judgment or giving advice) to the problems concerning their situations, will be satisfying to the family. Insert an occasional comment into a conversation to let them know that you are listening and that you understand what they are saying. A bit of silence during a visit is more apt to embarrass you than the family. But periods of silence do provide moments for both you and the family to think.

### Questioning

The way you ask questions will reveal your own attitude. You usually will ask them in order to understand a situation or get some needed information. The question "Do your children drink enough milk?" can carry an accusing or sarcastic note or one of friendly interest. The family can profit from your insight only if it becomes their insight. This is not likely to happen if you tell them in so many words. By encouraging them to elaborate upon an idea or by asking questions that may interpret and relate previously disconnected areas of the problem, they may recognize the point that you would like to make. Just because you think you see through a person, don't show off your discovery. Your reassurance and sympathy will be much more helpful.

Sometimes questions can direct the conversation to a more fruitful area. It is usually best to not ask questions that can be answered with a simple "yes" or "no." "I don't understand" is a good way to start some questions and perhaps curb some rambling. It's dangerous to imply the answer when you ask a question. Rather than "Does it take about a half hour a day" say "About how much time out of your day do you suppose those phone calls take?"

### Giving Advice and Suggestions

Because of your training, the families are sure that you are an "expert," better able to give them what they ask for than they themselves. If they have not already asked directly for suggestions you might lead with "Maybe you would like to ask me something?" Sometimes they will ask questions as trial balloons. This indicates their interest but is done mainly to test yours. Use the terminology and language of the family. We sometimes have a very different idea of the meaning of such words as "nutritious," "appropriate," and "conventional." Sometimes the family needs information or clear thinking more than advice. If they try to drop a problem in your lap with "What would you do?", ask what other people have done. You may also ask them whether they have any ideas of their own, and whether they have talked with anyone else about them. The times to use persuasion in an educational visit are few. (Counselling is defined as "deliberation together.") Allowing people to make their own decisions, however, must not become an excuse for an agent to refuse help.

## IV. VISITS -- A PART OF THE TOTAL PROGRAM

For an Extension agent, visits are one part of the total program which each part must supplement, enrich and increase. The primary object of the visit is the family being

served. The visits aid in the discovery of problems that make our program for group work vital. As we work with this method, we find stories and develop result demonstrations that we can use in our mass media program.

### Planning for Visits

Just as we do program planning for group work, we must do program planning for visits. We must decide how many families can be served and how much of our time will be used on this method of reaching people. These decisions should be made at the regular program planning time. They should be discussed in county staff conferences and with the councils and the committees who are responsible for the Extension program. A plan for the program of visitation should be discussed with the supervisor, written into the Plan of Work, and put into the calendar.

### Recording Visits

You should have a notebook and pencil handy during visits so that you can make a few notes. However, it is best to do as little writing during the visit as possible. As soon as the visit is completed, a narrative report should be prepared. It is important to do this soon after the visit, because it is so easy to forget important details; however, there is no reason to write every detail. You should make an attempt to identify the objective factors and your subjective feelings when you write this report.

It should include these following four paragraphs. The examples at the end of this publication are written in this manner:

1. Purpose. -- This should state the purpose for which you went. If it changed during the progress of the visit, state as much.
2. Observations. -- This should state the things you observed about the surroundings, the people, their activities and problems.
3. Help Given. -- Include here suggestions that you made or questions that seemed to help them clear up their thinking and follow up materials that you intend to mail or get to them in some other way.
4. Evaluation. -- Don't expect every visit to be completely successful. Two or three quotations from the visit that relate to its purpose are a good way to evaluate it. Statements as to things you will observe later in order to note progress should go here. Any use that you can possibly make of this experience in general program planning should be started.

You should make enough of a notation on your daily report to give information to the management agent for his supplemental report. A copy of the report should be put in your office file in the folder containing that family's records.

### Using the Visit Records

Before your general program planning training meetings, you could prepare for the leaders a summary of the vital problems that are frequently occurring in these visit records.



In some cases a few additional notes on how you will use this experience will be helpful. These records will be valuable when you are planning news stories, radio programs, or TV programs. In some cases you will be able to ask a family for a testimonial. Many families are glad to be the subject of a success story.

### Opportunities for Professional Growth

A Home Economics Agent's experiences in visiting afford an excellent opportunity for both professional and personal growth. The following are examples:

1. We can become increasingly aware of how Home Economists can contribute to the present day scene.
2. We can better appreciate and understand human nature.
3. We can experiment with methods of instruction.
4. We can observe 4-H'ers in their home setting.
5. We can develop judgment about the relative importance of practices we teach.
6. We can cultivate sensitiveness to others, and desirable personal traits such as tact.
7. We can enjoy the success of our clients.

### V. EXAMPLES

#### Visit Record - I

Name Mr. and Mrs. James A. Patterson

Time October 20 - 7:00 p.m. - on way to 4-H meeting, 10 minutes

Purpose To meet Mary and be sure that they understood that we wanted both to attend farm and home management meetings.

Observations They had just finished supper - the table was attractively set. Mary came from Indianapolis. She has been a beautician. Jim seemed proud to introduce her.

Help Given I told them Bill and Sue Young would be in the group. Sue's sister and her husband were in the spring group. I left one of the mimeographs.

Evaluation Mary marked the date on the calendar. Jim said to Mary, "You'd better talk to Sue about this."

## Visit Record - II

Name Mr. and Mrs. Floyd Ashland

Time January 15 - 3:30 - 4:45

Purpose To start the first Planning Guide

Observations The house is still incomplete - they moved in September 20. They have done much of the building -- native timber interior paneling. Mrs. Ashland wore blue jeans. Sewing machine was moved off the kitchen table in order for us to work there.

Help Given They told about building the house and showed us around. Occasionally I asked "Why?" and "How do you expect to use this?" They set dates for completing several goals about the house.

Evaluation They are well aware of why they moved here and how they think they want to live. Material for a magazine story on the "Do-it-Yourself" House of Timber from the Farm. The boys' 4-H projects were mentioned and they explained how this fits into their plan for their education.

## Visit Record - III

Name Mr. and Mrs. Claude Million

Time August 7 -- 9:30 - 11:00 a.m.

Purpose Mrs. Million asked for this appointment to get help on choosing laundry equipment. She seemed not to know very well what she wanted -- maybe repair old washer. This looked like an opportunity to work with a family that E. G. (Management Agent) felt had not thought very carefully on several decisions.

Observations A 1965 Ford Mustang was in the driveway. The house seemed to me to be untidy -- breakfast dishes still on table, children's clothes scattered around the living room, basket of ironing in dining room. Both were smiling, cheerful, seemed at ease especially after we looked at present washer and clothesline in basement. Children played outside.

Help Given I gave her the bulletin on Selecting Automatic Washers. I asked what they had thought of and we made a list with approximate cost of various kinds of washers and dryers. We talked about how much laundry she did and her pattern of work. I suggested they get estimates of cost and time involved on repair of present equipment. We talked about why they wanted a second car and the advantages of automatic laundry equipment vs. conventional vs. laundromat.

Evaluation Mr. Million - "That would more than half pay for a second-hand car. You really wouldn't have to wash so much."

Mrs. Million - "I like getting the laundry all done on Monday but I don't like this ironing laying around all week." She agreed to call and tell me if they bought new equipment or the cost of repair if they decided on that.

Visit Record - IV

<u>Name</u>	Mr. and Mrs. T. C. Bonas
<u>Time</u>	June 4 -- on way back from Home Demonstration Club -- 30 minutes
<u>Purpose</u>	To help and encourage Mrs. Bonas with her account keeping.
<u>Observations</u>	A new piano was in the living room. Monthly payments were in the account.
<u>Help Given</u>	We discussed under which headings to enter children's allowances, magazines, and postage. I asked where they entered county taxes on furniture and automobile. We figured cost-per-person-per-day on food for the first five months. I noticed and commented on the accordion file in which she was keeping receipts and the neat, well-arranged and equipped desk drawer.
<u>Evaluation</u>	Mrs. Bonas agreed to turn in her book for summary at the end of the year. She would be a good person for me to interview in a Young Homemakers class or on the radio.